

Formalizing the Fire Department

The General Court passed a Special Act in 1831 "to establish a Fire Department in the First or Harbor Parish, in the town of Gloucester." This Act did not include West Gloucester, Annisquam, Lanesville or Sandy Bay. The Act was accepted at a town meeting by a 95-to-64 vote. It was at this time that the town selectmen ordered reservoirs to be built and maintained in the Harbor Parish. The first of these was on the corner of Main and Pleasant Streets. Others were on Mason and Proctor Streets. Some of these have been uncovered when the water and sewerage departments have been digging to lay water mains or pipes. These reservoirs were used until 1884, when the city water system was installed and hydrants could be located all over the city.

The town of Rockport was set off from Gloucester in 1840; it took with it, as part of the settlement between the two towns, one engine. At that time, Rockport had a population of about 3,300 and Gloucester about 7,800. The biggest fire in Gloucester's history occurred in 1864 when 103 buildings were destroyed along with both sides of Front Street from Porter Street to Duncan Street. This was a terrible blow to the people of Gloucester, but they soon started to rebuild and many of those same buildings are still standing on Main Street. In 1873 the town of Gloucester became the City of Gloucester. In 1915, there were 177 men in the Fire Department; 27 were full time and 150 were call firefighters. The annual cost of the department in 1915 was about \$52,000. Today Gloucester has four fire stations and 83 full-time professional firefighters who carry on the traditions started back in 1789.

References

- *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Including the Town of Rockport*, by John J. Babson, 350th Anniversary Edition, published by :Peter Smith, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1972 .
- "The Story of Gloucester, Massachusetts," an address prepared by Fredrick W. Tibbets and given before the Convention of the Massachusetts State Firemen's Association at City Hall, Gloucester, Massachusetts on Thursday afternoon, September 21, 1916: © Fred W. Tibbets, 1917.
- *History of Gloucester*, a history for children written by Caroline E. Benham, Mrytle L. Cameron and Mildred K. Fink. ©1965 by Gloucester Public Schools}